AMALGAM COMICS™

THE WORLD'S GREATEST DEATH-CHEATERS!

CHALLENGERS OF THE Fantastic™

#1 JUNE 97

DIRECT EDITION

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THESE ARE PEOPLE OF RECKLESS COURAGE WHO SEEK OUT AND DEFY THE FANTASTIC WHICH LURKS IN MYSTERIOUS PLACES, GRIMLY COILED! THEY ARE THE WORLD'S GREATEST DEATH-CHEATERS!

CHALLENGERS OF THE Fantastic

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE MEN WHO LIVE ON BORROWED TIME (WHEN IT COMES TO DEAD-LINES)--

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BEFORE WE START OUR FANTASTIC TALE, LET US GO BACK TO THE MOMENTOUS DAY WHEN IT ALL BEGAN...

TAC

-- SHIELD'S HOLDING. COSMIC RAY PENETRATION -- .004 PERCENT.

TAC TAC TAC TAC TAC

YOU HEAR THAT, VICTOR? WE DID IT! FUTURE SPACEFLIGHTS WILL BE SAFE FROM POSSIBLE COSMIC MUTATION!

NOT THAT I HAD ANY DOUBTS...

...OR WE NEVER WOULD HAVE BROUGHT ALONG SENATOR GRIMM AND SUE'S YOUNG BROTHER!

THIS IS TOTALLY AWESOME, S/S!

ROUTINE DATA ORBITAL, JOHNNY.

I ONLY WISH YOU WERE HERE WITH US, VICTOR!

AND CHANCE SOMETHING HAPPENING TO MY GOOD LOOKS, REED?

NO -- SOMEONE HAD TO REMAIN AT BASE TO MONITOR THIS SECRET MISSION.

WISH IT WAS ME, VON DOOM! MAYBE NOW'S THE TIME TO TELL YOU GUYS THIS TRIP'S HUSH-HUSH ONLY TILL WE LAND...

...THEN WE'RE GONNA GET ELECTRONICALLY PLASTERED ACROSS THE GLOBE LIVE ON THAT BLASTED "HEROES" TV SHOW!

ORDERS OF THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF! LOTTA HOT AIR AN' HOO-HA IF YA ASK ME!

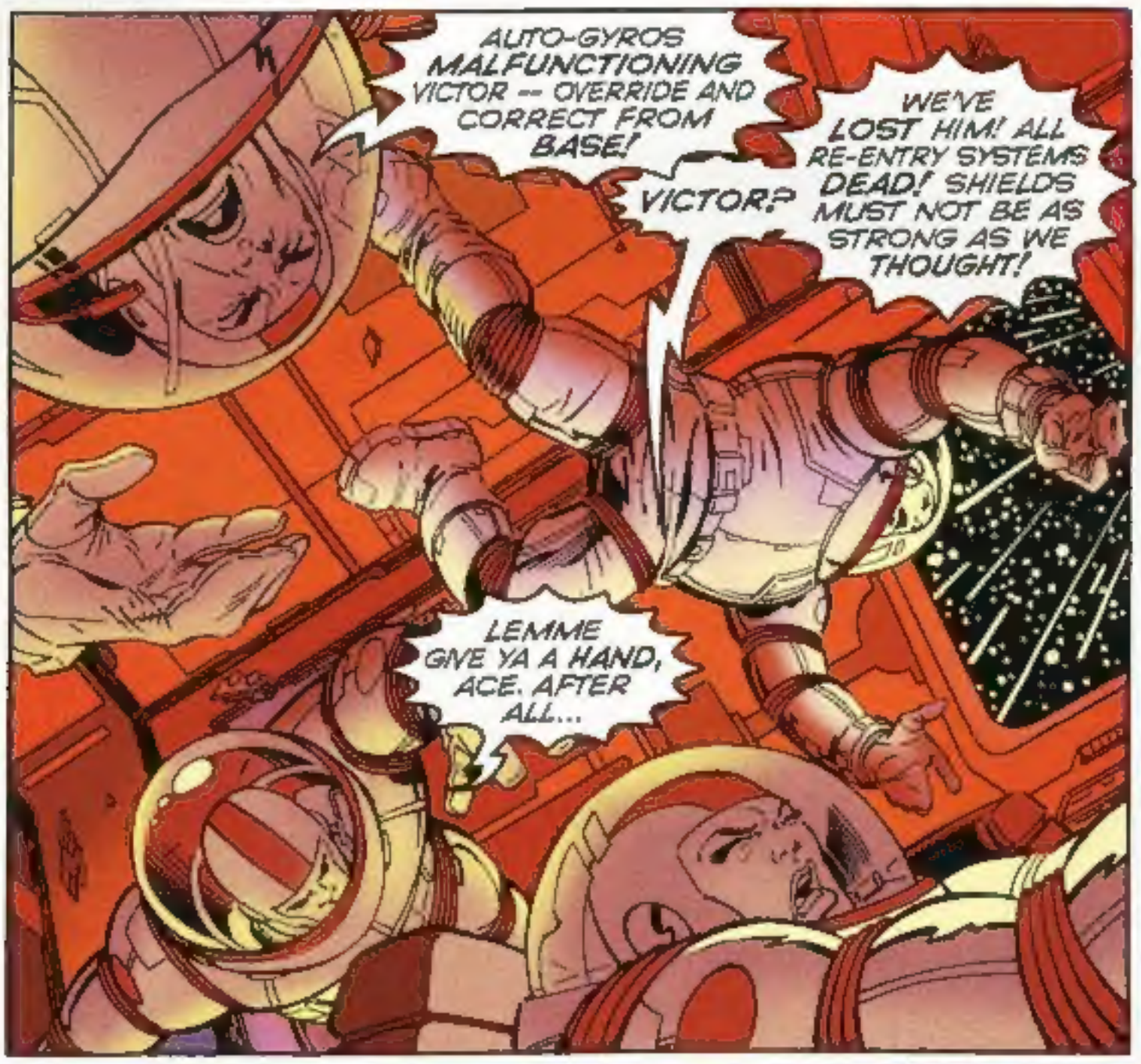
RICHARDS COULDN'T HAVE PERFECTED THAT SHIELDING WITHOUT ME -- AND NOW HE'LL GET THE GLORY?

NEVER!

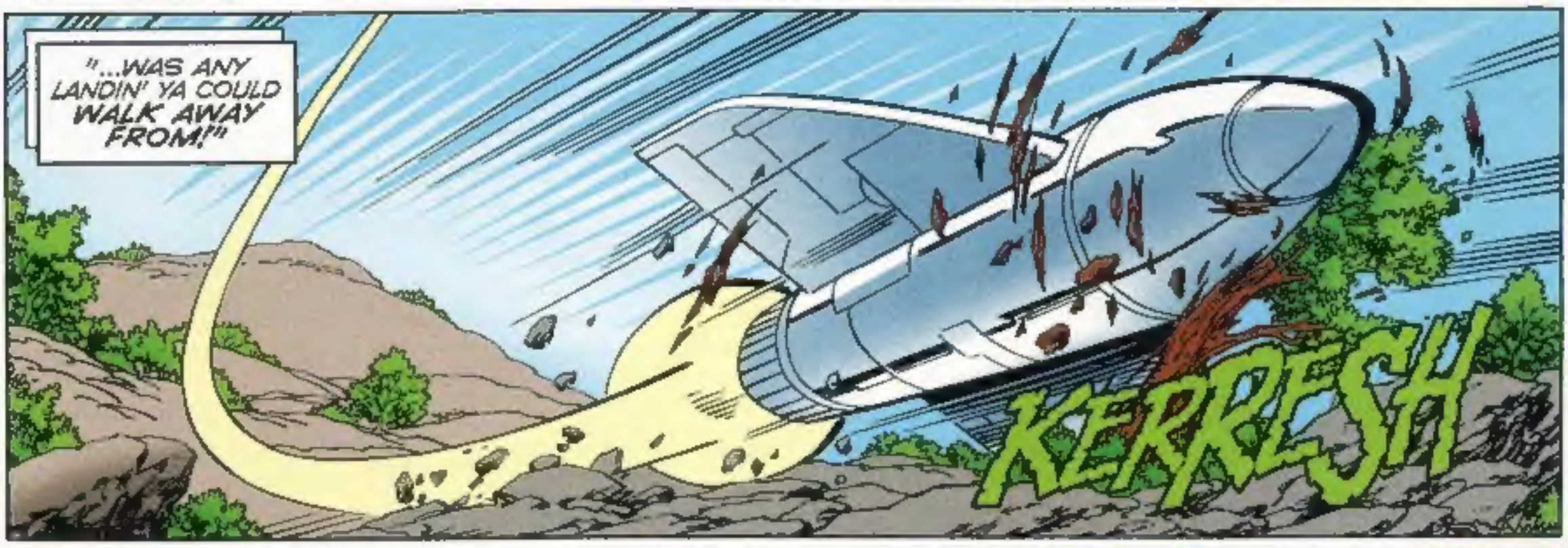
GUESS THIS IS OUR FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME -- EH, VICTOR?

YES, REED -- I, TOO, CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU FOUR "PLASTERED ACROSS THE GLOBE" AS THE SENATOR PUT IT...

TLEK


AUTO-GYROS MALFUNCTIONING VICTOR -- OVERRIDE AND CORRECT FROM BASE!
VICTOR?
WE'VE LOST HIM! ALL RE-ENTRY SYSTEMS DEAD! SHIELDS MUST NOT BE AS STRONG AS WE THOUGHT!
LEMME GIVE YA A HAND, ACE. AFTER ALL...

"IF YER GONNA ATTEMPT A CRASH LANDING, YER GONNA NEED ALL THE HELP YA CAN GET!
"SEE, WHEN I WAS FLYIN' BACK IN THE WAR, WE ALWAYS SAID A GOOD LANDIN'...


"...WAS ANY LANDIN' YA COULD WALK AWAY FROM!"
KERRESH

WE'RE... WE'RE ALIVE? THIS IS FANTASTIC!
YEAH -- AND TONS BETTER THAN THAT ROLLER COASTER AT HAPPYLAND! LET'S DO IT AGAIN!
Oh, SURE THING, RED -- 'CEPT MAYBE NEXT TIME WE'LL TRY DIFFUSIN' A NUCLEAR BOMB JUST FER A LITTLE VARIETY!

I THINK ALL THREE OF YOU ARE RIGHT! WE'VE BEEN GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE -- WHY NOT USE IT TO BETTER MANKIND...
...BY CHALLENGING THE FANTASTIC!

WE'RE THERE, SIS! HEY -- DOESN'T THIS ALMOST LOOK LIKE AN HOUR-GLASS?
WHY NOT, RED -- WE GOTTA BE LIVIN' ON BORROWED TIME!
INDEED! AND SO WERE BORN THE WORLD'S GREATEST DEATH-CHEATERS!

CHAPTER 1 FOUR AGAINST THE UNKNOWN!

-- CLAIM *SOVEREIGNTY* OVER *WAKANDA!*

SECRETARY OF STATE *KRAGOFF* IS CORRECT -- PRIMATES HAVE ANCESTRAL RIGHTS TO *ALL* OF AFRICA! WE WILL BE OPPRESSED *NO LONGER!*

YA DON'T SCARE *ME*, YA *BIG APES! GORILLA CITY'S* BEEN NOTHIN' BUT *TROUBLE* EVER SINCE IT FELL TO THE *COMMIES!*

WELL, THE *BRONZE TIGER'S* COUNTRY AIN'T NO *BANANA REPUBLIC* RIPE FER *PICKIN'*, SO --

BEEP BEEP BEEP

SENATOR GRIMM?

YA BETTER START THE WAR *WITHOUT* ME, KING -- SOMETHIN' *MORE IMPORTANT* JUST CAME UP!

I GOTTA HAUL OVER TO...

"... FANTASTIC MOUNTAIN!"

FASCINATING...

SECRETED AMONG THE PEAKS A SHORT DISTANCE NORTH OF NEW YORK CITY IS AN UNDERGROUND BASE THAT HOUSES THE CADMUS D.N.A. PROJECT.

IT IS ALSO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE WORLD-FAMOUS ***CHALLENGERS OF THE FANTASTIC!***

...THERE'S A UNIVERSE-TWO THAT EXISTS JUST BEYOND OUR CONTINUUM! IT'S ALMOST EXACTLY LIKE OURS...
...EXCEPT MY DATA INDICATES ITS "HEROIC AGE" BEGAN DURING WORLD WAR TWO WITH GROUPS SUCH AS SPITFIRE AND THE BLACKHAWKS...
...CONTINUING INTO PRESENT DAY WITH CERTAIN DESCENDANTS PLAYING PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AS INFINITE KICKERS, INC. THE IMPLICATIONS ARE --
ACE TO PROF! REPORT TO THE BRIEFING ROOM A.S.A.P! THE CHALLENGERS HAVE A MISSION!
Um...I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF DISCOVERING A NEW DIMENSION RIGHT NOW, SUE.
IT'LL STILL BE THERE WHEN WE GET BACK... IF WE GET BACK!
MEANWILE, SIX LEVELS OFF (IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE)...
CONCENTRATE, SIR! BY NOW YOU'RE USUALLY ON LEVEL TEN OF THE SPIDER-BOY: TOTAL BIZARNAGE GAME!
FIGURES -- ONLY A MINIATURE CLONE OF MYSELF WOULD KNOW I WAS BAGGIN' THIS ONE!
FACT IS, MY LITTLE STORMTROOPER PAL, ALL I CAN REALLY THINK ABOUT IS...
"...HOW VYKIN THE BLACK BOLT FORBID ME FROM EVER SEEIN' DREAM CRYSTAL AGAIN -- THE ONLY GAL I EVER REALLY LOVED!
"BIG GORGON, MEDUSA MOONRIDER, TRISERINAK -- ALL THE UN-PEOPLE -- EVEN ROCKY AND WYATT FLYING STAG WOULDN'T HELP US!"*
IN THE NOW -- CLASSIC STRANGE TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED #137 -- Back-issue Brevoort.

BELAY THAT ANGST, SIR! I'M RECEIVING A TRANSMISSION OVER MY HELMET-COM!
AGENT STORM HAS ORDERED A CHALLENGER BRIEFING FOR 1430 HOURS! I SUGGEST YOU...

"... DOUBLE-TIME IT!"
CAN'T WAIT TO SEE SOME ACTION! WHAT'S THE DEAL, PROF?
I HAVE NO IDEA, JOHNNY. BUT I DO KNOW THE ONE PERSON YOU NEVER KEEP WAITING IS...

SUE?!
WHOA! CHECK OUT THE HAIR -- WHAT'S LEFT OF IT!
YOU, Um, YOU MUST ADMIT IT... IT'S STRIKING, JOHNNY -- NOT TO MENTION PRACTICAL, CONSIDERING HER DUTIES!
WELL I PRACTICALLY GOT A HEART ATTACK RUSHIN' UP HERE FROM THE U.N. -- IT BETTER NOT BE JUST SO'S ACE CAN SHOW OFF HER NEW 'DU!
HARDLY, OLD FRIEND. OUR WORLD IS ABOUT TO FACE THE MOST FANTASTIC THREAT OF ITS ENTIRE HISTORY!
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME...

WHAT IN THE NAME'A UNCLE COSMO --?
WHERE'D HE COME FROM?
I'LL BE SUPER-AMALGAMATED IT'S --
... YOU WILL SOON ENOUGH!

-- UATU, THE GUARDIAN!

FEAR NOT, PROFESSOR RICHARDS -- I AM *NOT* THE MENACE ABOUT WHICH AGENT STORM SPOKE.

WHILE I HAVE PLEDGED *NON-INTERFERENCE* SINCE REGAINING MY *SANITY*, SOMETHING HAS COME TO MY ATTENTION WHICH FORCES ME TO *BREAK* THAT VOW.

DIRE NEWS WHICH I HOPE WILL *REPAY* THE DEBT I OWE YOUR QUARTET FOR THE *FANTASTIC CHALLENGE* YOU UNDERTOOK TO *CURE* ME USING THE *MOTHER CUBE!**

*DURING AMALGAM'S AMAZING *FINAL ONSLAUGHT MINI-SERIES* OF COUSE -- Toteboard Tom

YEAH? WELL, *HERE'S* A BRIGHT IDEA, BIG BLUE -- IF YA GOT SOMETHIN' TO SAY... *SAY IT!*

IF WERE TALKIN' THE END OF THE *WORLD* HERE, THIS AIN'T *NO TIME* FOR FILIBUSTERS OR FANCY SPEECHES!

I'M CERTAIN UATU WILL TELL US WHEN HE'S READY, BEN, AND NOT ONE MOMENT BE --

GALACTIAC IS COMING!

GALACTIAC -- THE ULTIMATE SYNTHESIS OF *MIND* AND *MACHINE!*

GALACTIAC -- HE WHO DRAINS THE *LIFEBLOOD* OF PLANETS TO RECHARGE HIS *ENERGY-CELLS!*

GALACTIAC -- AS *OLD* AS TIME ITSELF! AS *POWERFUL* AS SPACE IS *VAST!*

OKAY, OKAY -- WE *GET THE PICTURE!* NOW HOW 'BOUT GETTIN' *US* BACK ON...

... TERRA FIRMA?

Uh... YEAH, OKAY. THANKS.

UATU -- IF GALACTIAC IS AS *OMNIPOTENT* AS YOU SAY... HOW CAN WE *POSSIBLY* STOP HIM?

I SAY WE'RE UP AGAINST SOME *GEAR-HEADED GOON,* WE START BY CHECKIN' WITH OUR RESIDENT *ROBO-EXPERT!*

JUNE MASTERS? I DON'T *TRUST* HER, ROCKY. REMEMBER, SHE'S THE *DAUGHTER* OF...

"... *MULTI-MASTERS,* THE VILLAIN WHO NEARLY *DESTROYED* US WITH HIS TWISTED CREATION -- *ULTIVAC THE MULTI-ROBOT!*"

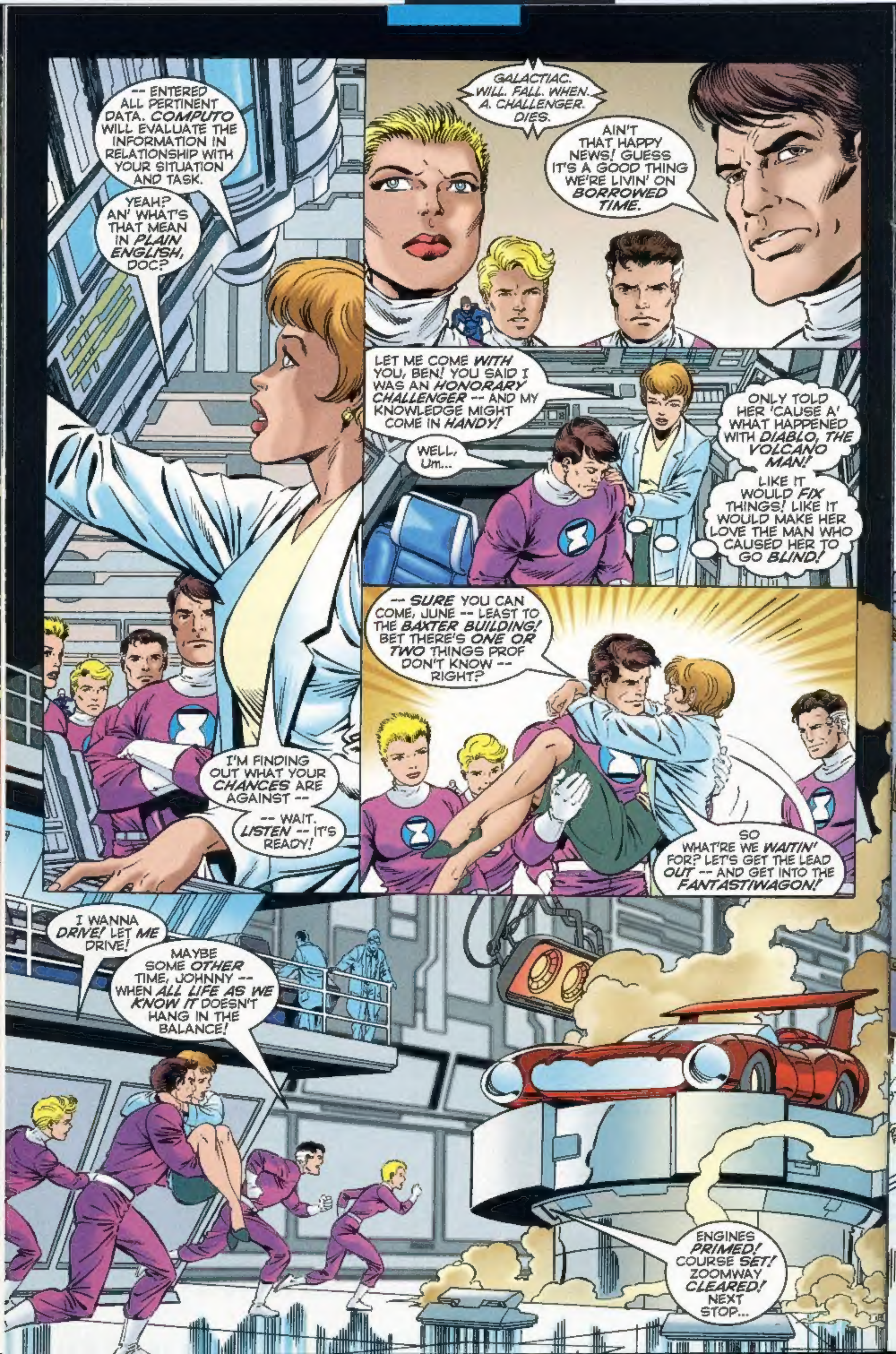
TRUE... BUT IT WAS ALSO JUNE WHO CURED ME OF THE *EVIL D.N.A.* THAT HAD SOMEHOW INFECTED MY BODY, SUE!

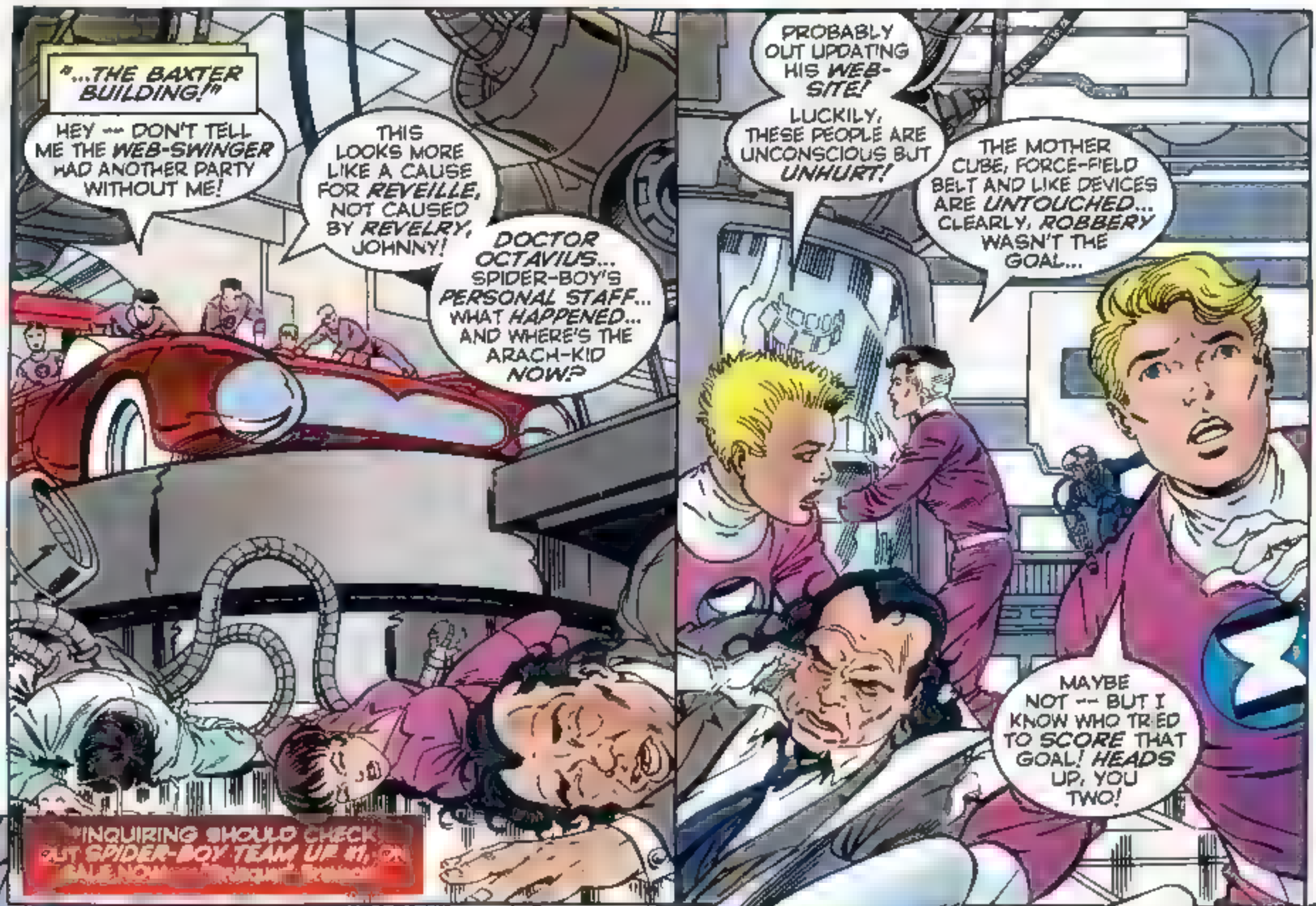
YES -- I'LL *NEVER* FORGET THAT, REED. IF SHE *HADN'T,* I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT... WHAT *CADMUS* WOULD DO *WITHOUT* YOU!

PANT MUCH, SIS? I MEAN, WHEN I FALL FOR SOMEONE I GO *ALL THE WAY* -- BUT *YOU* CAN'T PICK BETWEEN PROF AND THE *MARINER!*

WHILE YOU'RE FIGURIN' IT *OUT,* THE REST OF US'LL BE IN *JUNE MASTERS' LAB...*

THIS WAY, MEN!

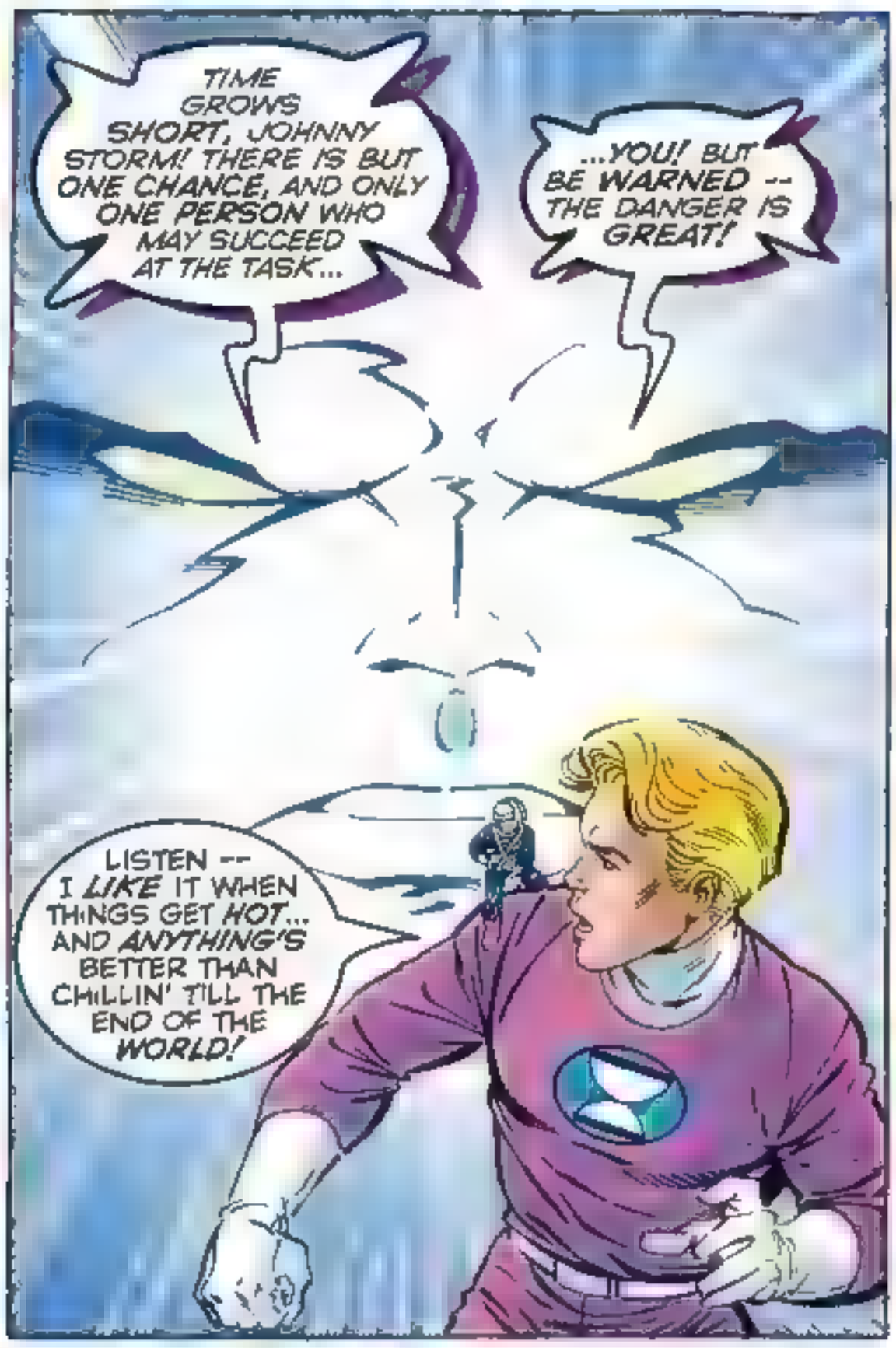

-- ENTERED ALL PERTINENT DATA. COMPUTO WILL EVALUATE THE INFORMATION IN RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SITUATION AND TASK.
YEAH? AN' WHAT'S THAT MEAN IN PLAIN ENGLISH, DOC?
GALACTIAC. WILL. FALL. WHEN. A. CHALLENGER. DIES.
AIN'T THAT HAPPY NEWS! GUESS IT'S A GOOD THING WE'RE LIVIN' ON BORROWED TIME.
LET ME COME WITH YOU, BEN! YOU SAID I WAS AN HONORARY CHALLENGER -- AND MY KNOWLEDGE MIGHT COME IN HANDY!
WELL, UM...
ONLY TOLD HER 'CAUSE A' WHAT HAPPENED WITH DIABLO, THE VOLCANO MAN!
LIKE IT WOULD FIX THINGS! LIKE IT WOULD MAKE HER LOVE THE MAN WHO CAUSED HER TO GO BLIND!
I'M FINDING OUT WHAT YOUR CHANCES ARE AGAINST --
-- WAIT. LISTEN -- IT'S READY!
-- SURE YOU CAN COME, JUNE -- LEAST TO THE BAXTER BUILDING! BET THERE'S ONE OR TWO THINGS PROF DON'T KNOW -- RIGHT?
SO WHAT'RE WE WAITIN' FOR? LET'S GET THE LEAD OUT -- AND GET INTO THE FANTASTIWAGON!
I WANNA DRIVE! LET ME DRIVE!
MAYBE SOME OTHER TIME, JOHNNY -- WHEN ALL LIFE AS WE KNOW IT DOESN'T HANG IN THE BALANCE!
ENGINES PRIMED! COURSE SET! ZOOMWAY CLEARED! NEXT STOP...


"...THE BAXTER BUILDING!"
HEY -- DON'T TELL ME THE WEB-SWINGER HAD ANOTHER PARTY WITHOUT ME!
THIS LOOKS MORE LIKE A CAUSE FOR REVEILLE, NOT CAUSED BY REVELRY, JOHNNY!
DOCTOR OCTAVIUS... SPIDER-BOY'S PERSONAL STAFF... WHAT HAPPENED... AND WHERE'S THE ARACH-KID NOW?
PROBABLY OUT UPDATING HIS WEB-SITE!
LUCKILY, THESE PEOPLE ARE UNCONSCIOUS BUT UNHURT!
THE MOTHER CUBE, FORCE-FIELD BELT AND LIKE DEVICES ARE UNTOUCHED... CLEARLY, ROBBERY WASN'T THE GOAL...
MAYBE NOT -- BUT I KNOW WHO TRIED TO SCORE THAT GOAL! HEADS UP, YOU TWO!
INQUIRING SHOULD CHECK OUT SPIDER-BOY TEAM UP #1, ON SALE NOW

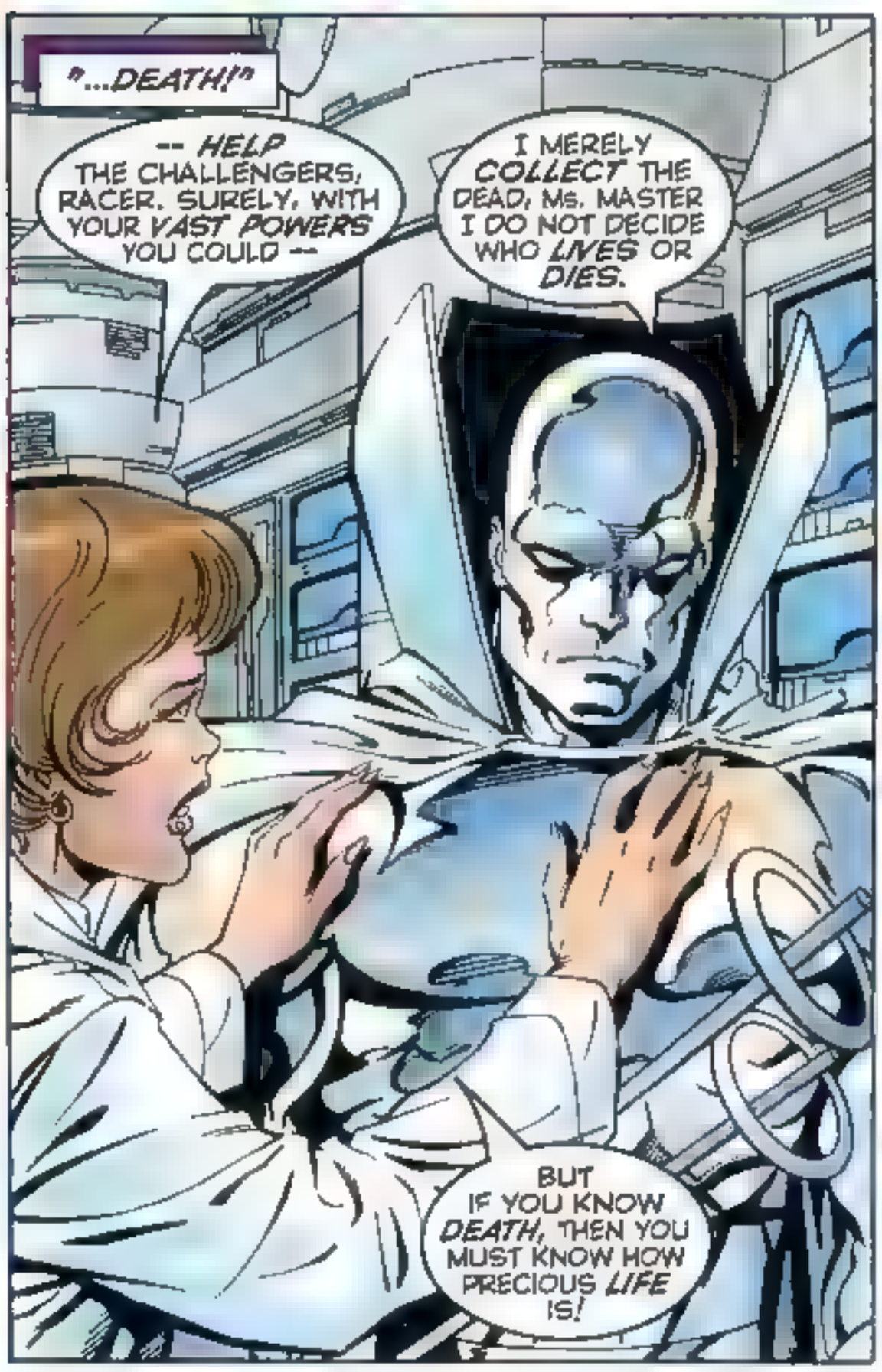
THE SILVER RACER!
BUT WHY WOULD THE NEW ASGODIAN AVATAR OF DEATH ATTACK INNOCENT PEOPLE?
I HAVE COME TO CLAIM A LIFE -- BUT NOT ONE OF THEIRS!
DEATH WAITS ABOVE! GO! THE CHALLENGERS HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN THAT WHICH IS ABOUT TO UNFOLD!
INDEED I DID NOT, PROFESSOR -- I MERELY SUBDUED THOSE WHO ATTACKED ME OUT OF FEAR.

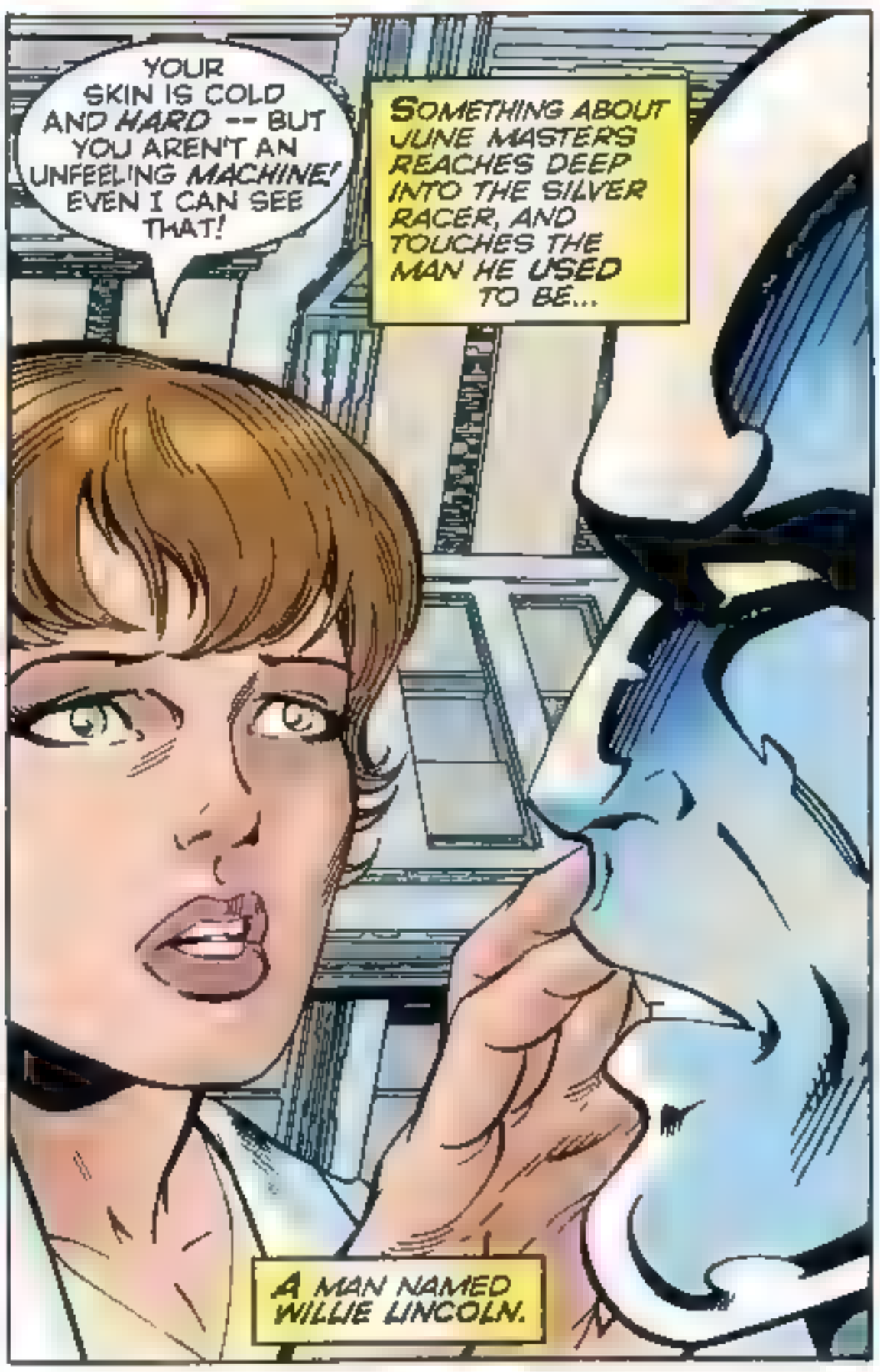
CHAPTER 2
THE POWER OF GALACTIAC!
GOOD LORD! THIS IS -- FANTASTIC!
GUESS THAT REALLY MAKES IT A JOB FOR YOU-KNOW-WHO, huh?
NO SWEAT, RED -- JUST TELL THIS OVER-GROWN ACTION-FIGURE HOW MANY FORMS HE'S GOTTA FILL OUT BUILDIN' SOMETHIN' LIKE THIS IN MANHATTAN...
.. AN' HE WON'T BE ABLE TO GET OUTTA TOWN FAST ENOUGH!

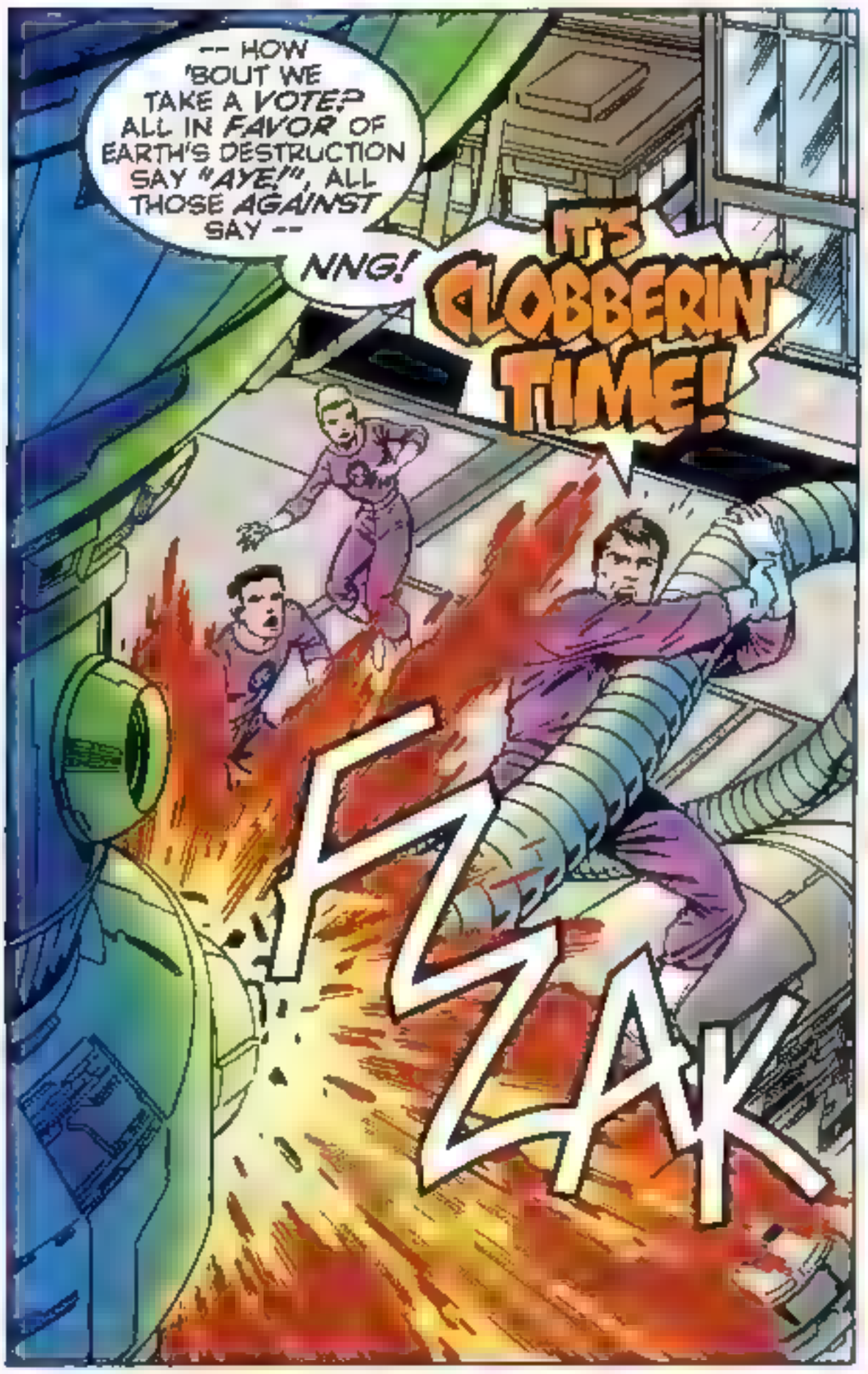
I FEAR GALACTIAC IS BEYOND OUR LAWS, BEN -- LET'S HOPE HE'S NOT BEYOND LISTENING TO REASON!
GALACTIAC -- HEAR ME! HOW CAN YOU DESTROY OUR WORLD? A WORLD SO FULL OF LIFE!
SURELY, THERE ARE OTHER, UNINHABITED PLANETS THAT COULD REPLENISH YOUR ENERGY CELLS!
Ah -- NATIVE LIFEFORMS. FASCINATING.
YOU HAVE BEEN MISINFORMED I DO NOT COMPLETELY OBLITERATE ANY PLANET I RAZE.
I MINIATURIZE A SECTION OF IT TO PRESERVE... TO STUDY IN THIS CASE, I HAVE CHOSEN THE SITE YOU CALL... NEW YORK CITY.
TAKE LATKOVIA, YA BIG BUG COLLECTOR -- AND MAYBE EVEN NEW JERSEY JUST LEAVE THE REST ALONE!
HE GETS NOTHING, ROCKY! I'M CALLING IN A S.H.I.E.L.D. STRIKE TO --!
-- YEAH! STRANGE -- MY COM-LINK'S DEAD!
THAT IS CORRECT, FEMALE. I HAVE SURROUNDED THIS AREA WITH AN IMPENETRABLE HEAVY ENERGY SHELL.
NOTHING FROM THIS PLANET WILL ENTER OR LEAVE IT UNTIL MY WORK IS DONE!


TIME GROWS SHORT, JOHNNY STORM! THERE IS BUT ONE CHANCE, AND ONLY ONE PERSON WHO MAY SUCCEED AT THE TASK...
...YOU! BUT BE WARNED -- THE DANGER IS GREAT!
LISTEN -- I LIKE IT WHEN THINGS GET HOT... AND ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN CHILLIN' TILL THE END OF THE WORLD!

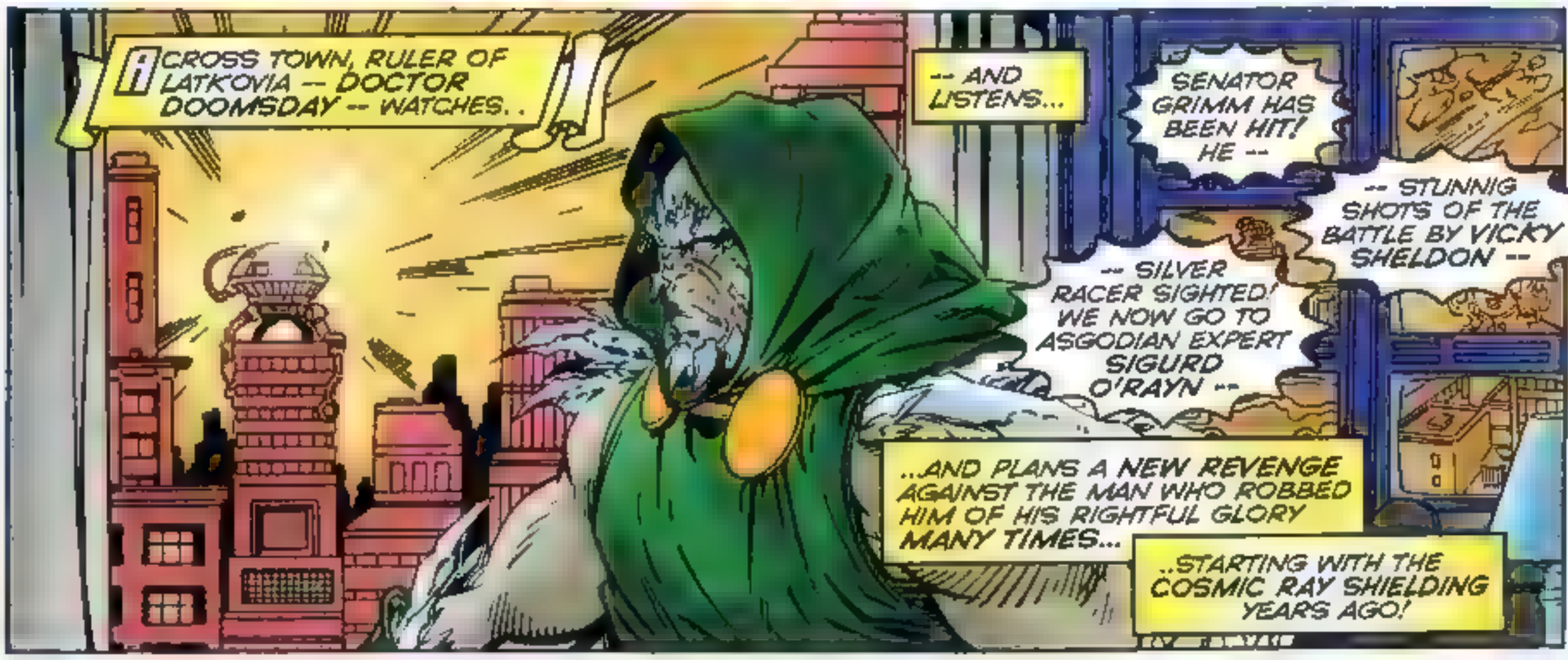
FRASHAWW
THEN PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A JOURNEY MORE FANTASTIC THAN ANY YOU HAVE EVER EXPERIENCED!
BUT DO NOT FORGET THAT IF YOU FAIL, THE ONLY VICTOR TODAY SHALL BE...


"...DEATH!"
-- HELP THE CHALLENGERS, RACER. SURELY, WITH YOUR VAST POWERS YOU COULD --
I MERELY COLLECT THE DEAD, Ms. MASTER I DO NOT DECIDE WHO LIVES OR DIES.
BUT IF YOU KNOW DEATH, THEN YOU MUST KNOW HOW PRECIOUS LIFE IS!


YOUR SKIN IS COLD AND HARD -- BUT YOU AREN'T AN UNFEELING MACHINE! EVEN I CAN SEE THAT!
SOMETHING ABOUT JUNE MASTERS REACHES DEEP INTO THE SILVER RACER, AND TOUCHES THE MAN HE USED TO BE...
A MAN NAMED WILLIE LINCOLN.


-- HOW 'BOUT WE TAKE A VOTE? ALL IN FAVOR OF EARTH'S DESTRUCTION SAY "AYE!", ALL THOSE AGAINST SAY --
NNG!
IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
FZZAK

YOU HAVE SUCCEEDED IN GAINING MY ATTENTION, EARTHLING. YOU HAVE ALSO SUCCEEDED IN AROUSING MY WRATH.
AAA--!
ROCKY!


ACROSS TOWN, RULER OF LATKOVIA -- DOCTOR DOOMSDAY -- WATCHES..
-- AND LISTENS...
SENATOR GRIMM HAS BEEN HIT! HE --
-- STUNNIG SHOTS OF THE BATTLE BY VICKY SHELDON --
-- SILVER RACER SIGHTED! WE NOW GO TO ASGODIAN EXPERT SIGURD O'RAYN --
...AND PLANS A NEW REVENGE AGAINST THE MAN WHO ROBBED HIM OF HIS RIGHTFUL GLORY MANY TIMES...
..STARTING WITH THE COSMIC RAY SHIELDING YEARS AGO!

AS YOU CAN SEE, I FOUND THE NAME YOU CALLED THIS LIFEFORM QUITE... EVOCATIVE.
I'LL BE SUPER-AMALGAMATED!
GALACTIAC'S RAY TURNED ROCKY INTO SOME K ND OF --

CHAPTER 3 FOUR-ARMED THING!

HE'S... HE'S LITTLE MORE THAN A *MINDLESS MINION* DEDICATED TO *DEATH AND DESTRUCTION!*

GALACTIAC'S PERSONAL *PUNISHER!*

ARURK!

THWAMM

--EHG!

ROLL WITH THE *SHOCK-WAVES!*

ARUK!

SHRENGK

SIXTY-FOOT DROP TO *TITANIUM FLOORING!*

PLAN *COMMAND-D,* REED!

GOOD CALL, SUE!

THAT SHOULD GIVE ME ENOUGH TIME TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO TURN THIS SITUATION TO OUR *ADVANTAGE!* ALTHOUGH...

"...IT MIGHT NOT BE AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS!"

WHOA -- CLOSE ONE!

THE NEXT FLOATER DISC BETTER REZ-IN SOON OR OL' RED STORM'S GONNA BE A RED SHIRT!

BACK OFF, BETA-RAY BULLETS! YOU'RE WAY TOO FIRST-LEVEL TO TAKE OUT YOURS TRULY!

FOOM

HOW'M I DOIN', UATU? GOT HIGH SCORE YET?

THIS IS NO GAME, BOY -- ALTHOUGH YOUR ARCADE ABILITIES WERE ONE OF YOUR UNIQUE QUALIFICATIONS FOR THIS MISSION!

A MISSION YOU NOW NEAR THE END OF BEHOLD!

AWESOME! I JUST GOT ONE QUESTION...

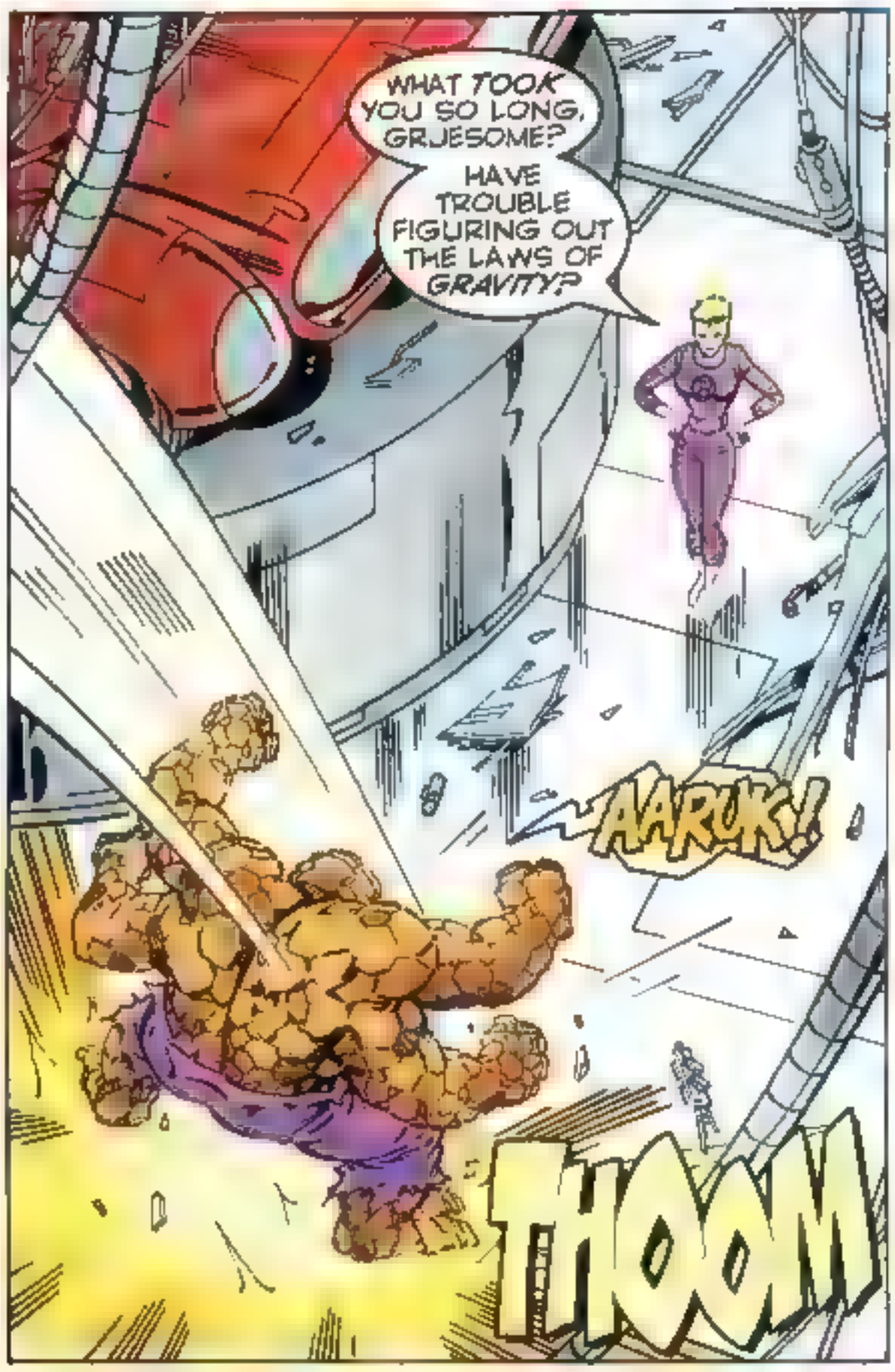
Um... WHERE'D THIS THING COME FROM?

IT WAS HERE ALL ALONG, JOHNNY STORM -- YOU ARE CLOSE ENOUGH THAT IT IS NOW VISIBLE...

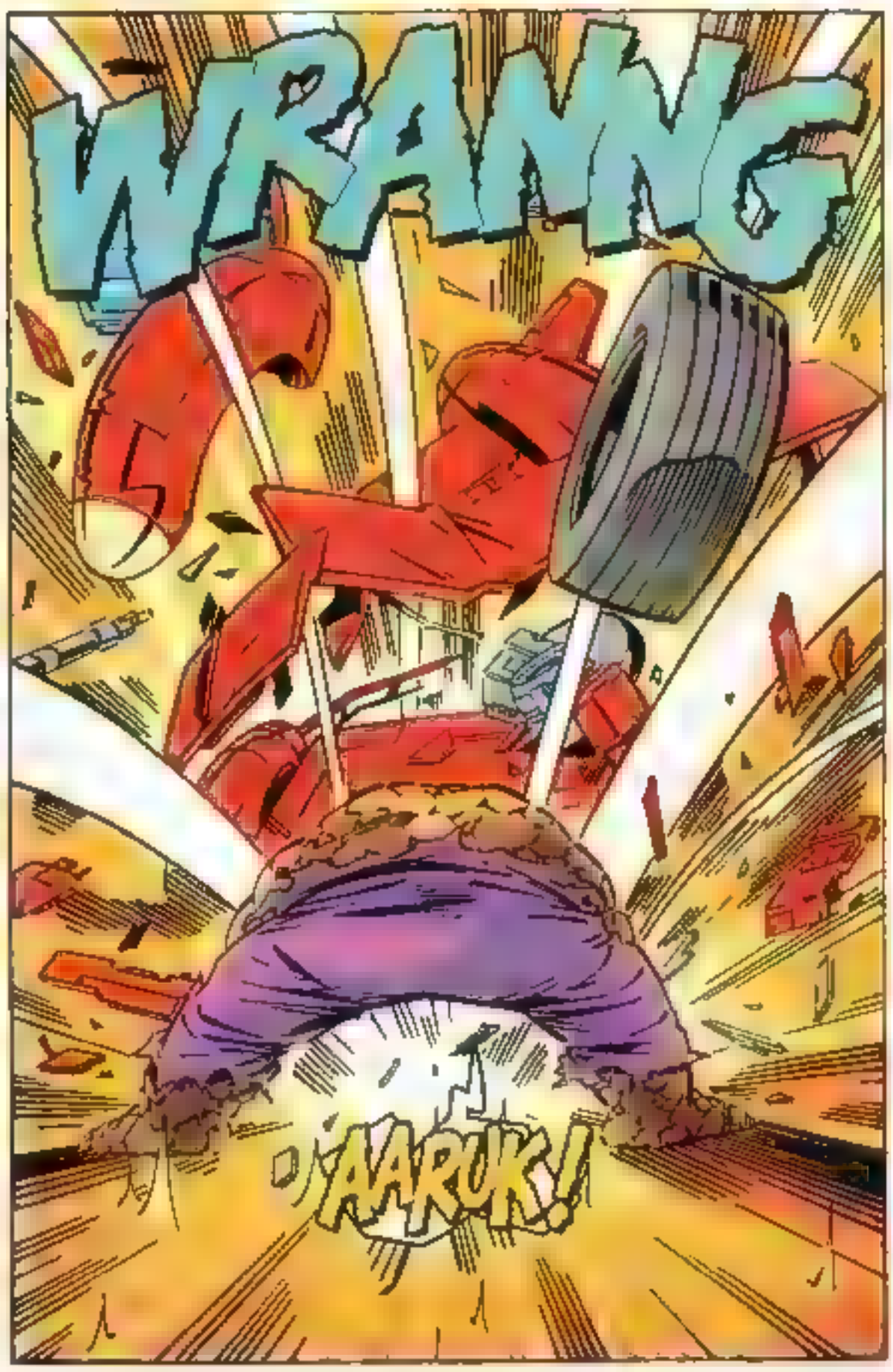
...NOW IT IS VULNERABLE!

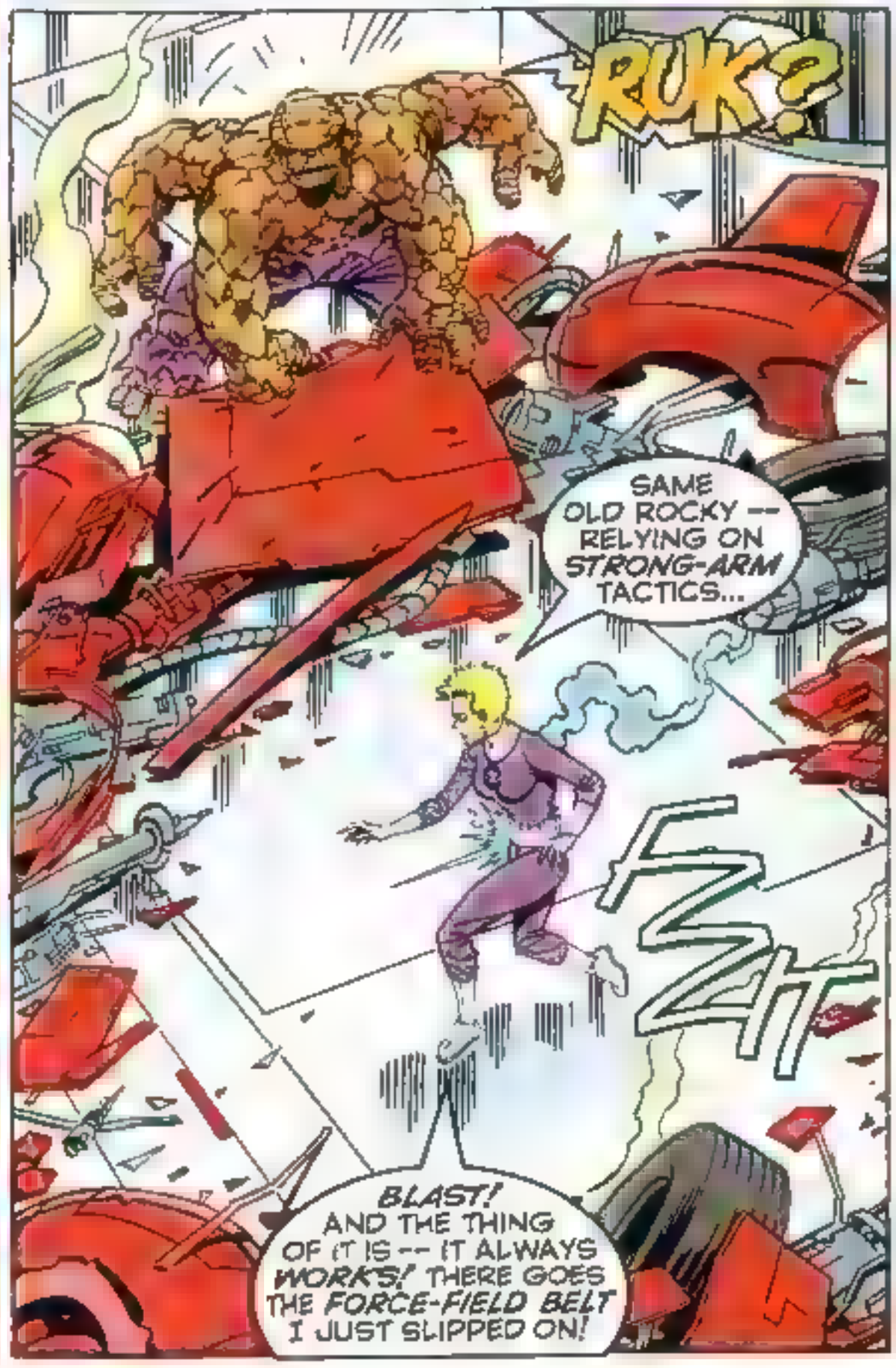
THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND DANGEROUS PART OF YOUR JOURNEY! YOU MUST USE YOUR WEAPON AGAINST THIS DEVICE.

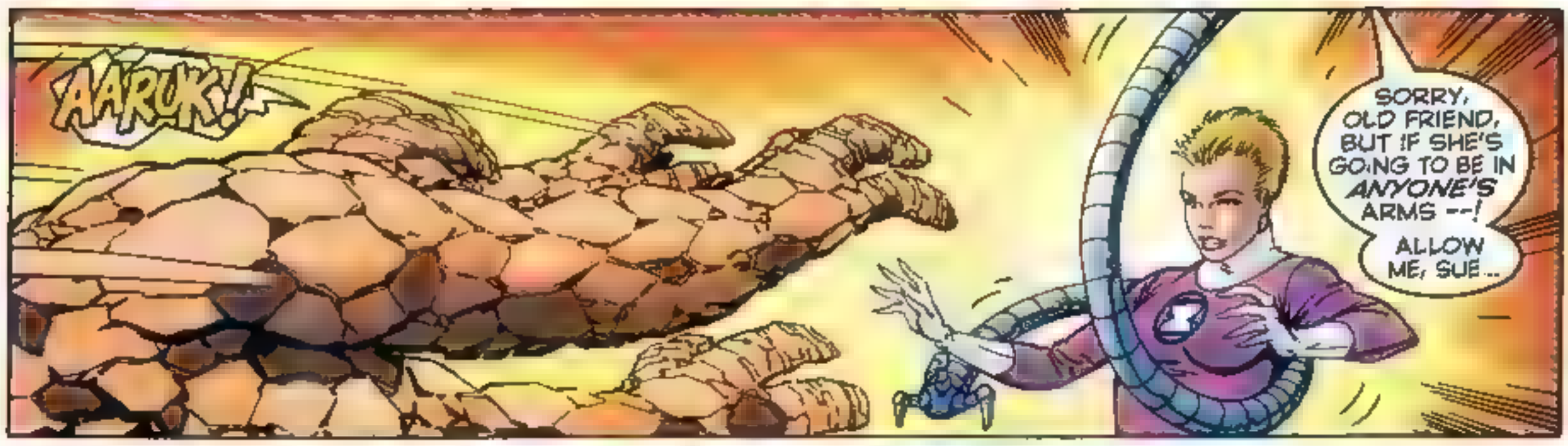
...AND, ULTIMATELY, NULLIFY IT!

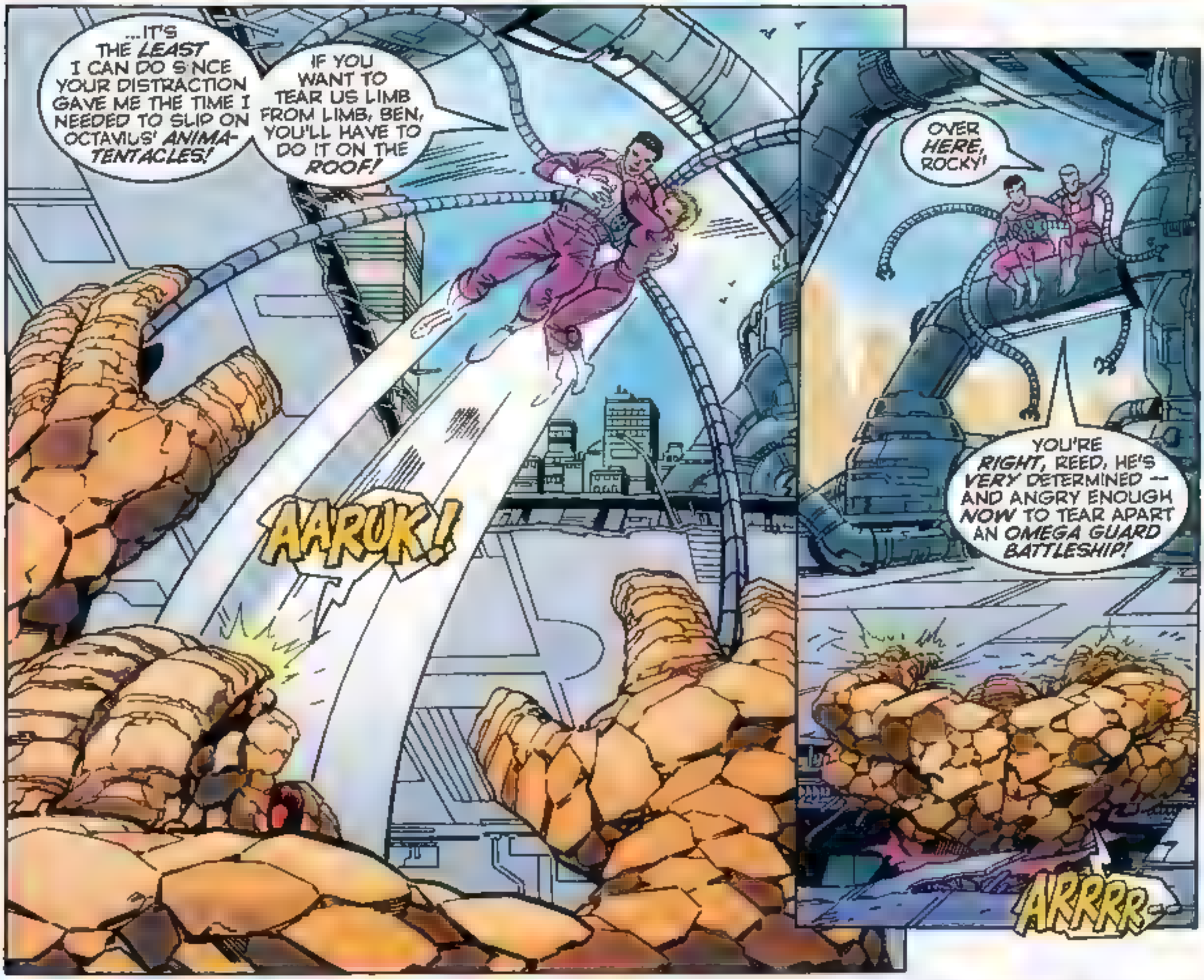

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG, GRUESOME?
HAVE TROUBLE FIGURING OUT THE LAWS OF GRAVITY?
AARUK!
THOOM

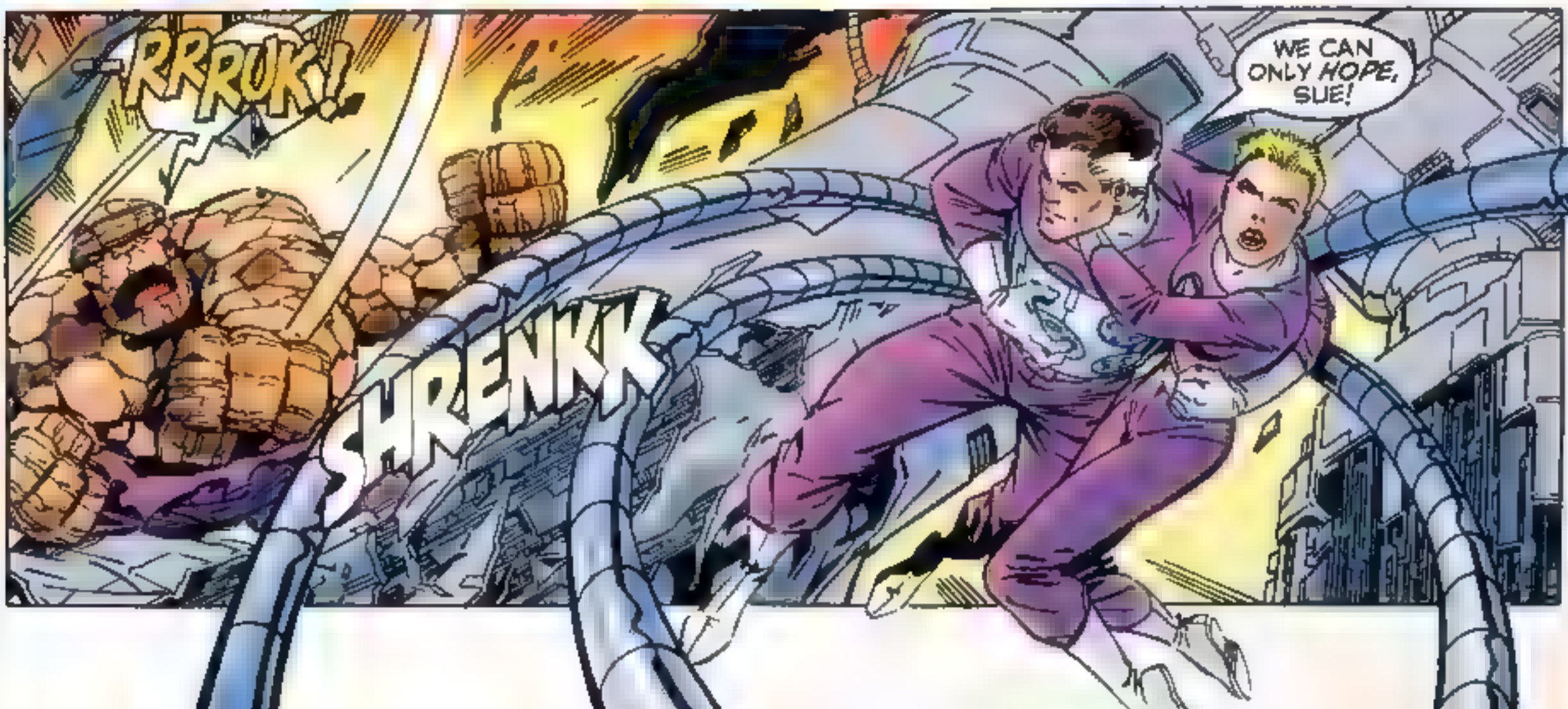
AARUK! AARUK!
VERY STRONG BIG DEAL.
ME -- I'M MORE IMPRESSED WITH A MAN'S MIND THAN HIS MUSCLES. GIVE ME FOUR-EYES OVER FOUR-ARMS ANY DA--


WRANG
AARUK!


RUK?
SAME OLD ROCKY -- RELYING ON STRONG-ARM TACTICS...
FZZT
BLAST! AND THE THING OF IT IS -- IT ALWAYS WORKS! THERE GOES THE FORCE-FIELD BELT I JUST SLIPPED ON!


AARUK!
SORRY, OLD FRIEND, BUT IF SHE'S GOING TO BE IN ANYONE'S ARMS --!
ALLOW ME, SUE...


...IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO SINCE YOUR DISTRACTION GAVE ME THE TIME I NEEDED TO SLIP ON OCTAVIUS' ANIMA-TENTACLES!
IF YOU WANT TO TEAR US LIMB FROM LIMB, BEN, YOU'LL HAVE TO DO IT ON THE ROOF!
AARUK!
OVER HERE, ROCKY!
YOU'RE RIGHT, REED, HE'S VERY DETERMINED -- AND ANGRY ENOUGH NOW TO TEAR APART AN OMEGA GUARD BATTLESHIP!
ARRRR--


--RRRUK!
SHRENKK
WE CAN ONLY HOPE, SUE!

YOU RUBBLE-ENCRUSTED MISCREANT -- YOU HAVE DESTROYED MY TERRA-MATRIX.
FOR THAT YOU SHALL PAY THE ULTIMATE PRICE..
AARUK!

FWOOM
NOW, RED STORM! STRIKE NOW, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT -- REGARDLESS OF THE COST!
ALWAYS WANTED TO GO IN A BLAZE OF GLORY --!

I WILL STAND IDLE NO LONGER!
I BRING DEATH TO ONE WHO HAS EVADED MY TOUCH -- LONGER THAN MOST!

FRA ZHAMM
"I'LL BE SUPER-AMALGAMATED! THAT LIGHT-BLINDING!
"SUE! WHERE ARE YOU, SUE ?
"IS ANYONE THERE? SUE? JOHNNY..?"

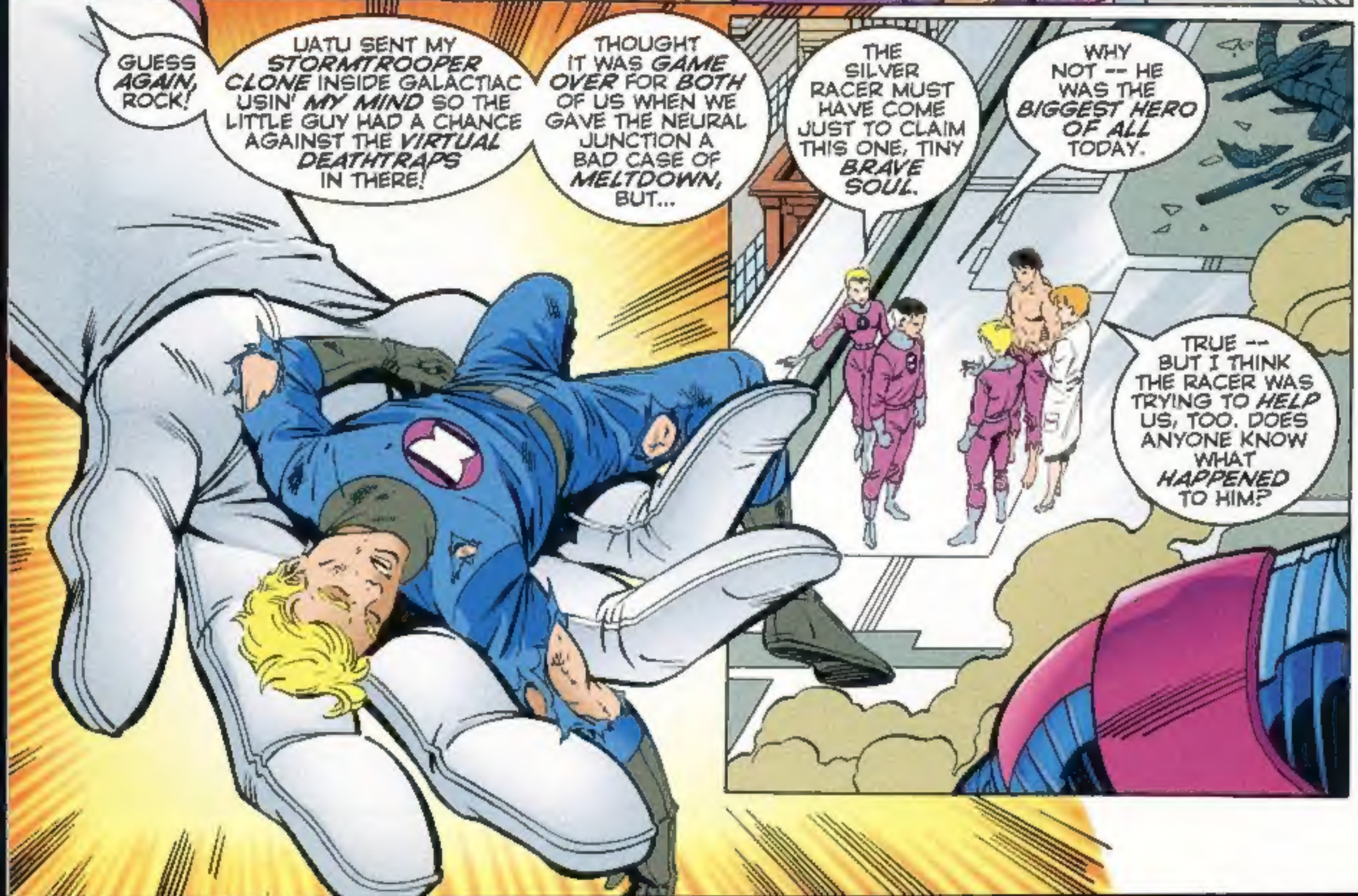
...ROCKY?!
GOOD LORD! THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANTED TO SEE WHEN MY VISION CLEARED!
EVERY-THING'S STILL OUT OF FOCUS! IS HE --?

NGH! AH! FEELS LIKE SOMEONE SAND-BLASTED EVERY BLAMED INCH A' ME!
THERE OUGHTTA BE A LAW--!
NOTHING. SEEMS FROZEN IN PLACE... TOTALLY IMMOBILIZED. NO TELLING --
WAIT!
KCHEF
I'D SAY HE'S FINE, SUE.
WHAT'S GALACTIAC DOING?
FOOLISH LIFEFORMS. DID YOU THINK I WOULD NOT HAVE BACK-UP SYSTEMS TO MY MAIN NEURAL JUNCTION?
I AM FAR TOO WEAK IN THIS FORM TO EXACT RETRIBUTION... BUT REST ASSURED YOU HAVE NOT HEARD THE LAST OF GALACTIAC!

WELL, THEN YOU AIN'T HEARD THE LAST OF THE *CHALLENGERS OF THE FANTASTIC* EITHER, PAL!
THAT'S *RIGHT*, BEN -- AND NEXT TIME WE'LL BE *FULLY PREPARED!*

Y'KNOW, PROF -- I REMEMBER BEIN' THAT... *THING*, AN' I WAS THINKIN' IF YOU COUD CHANGE ME BACK INTO IT SOMEHOW, BUT WITH ME IN *CONTROL*...
...IT WOULD BE A *PERFECT* DEFENSE AGAINST GALACTIAC -- *AND* USEFUL ON *OTHER* MISSIONS.
I'LL *FIND* A WAY TO DO IT, OLD FRIEND -- I *SWEAR!*

WATCH THE *LANGUAGE*, PROF -- I'M STILL YOUNG AN' *IMPRESSIONABLE*... NOT LIKE THAT'S HOW I *FEEL* RIGHT NOW!
I FOUND RED IN A ROOM DOWN *BELOW* -- ALMOST IN A *TRANCE*. HE'S WEAK BUT *UNHURT*.
THEN IT'S TIME TO SHOOT OFF SOME *FIREWORKS*, DOC! THAT CRAZY *COMPUTO* A' YERS WAS ALL *WRONG!*
GALACTIAC *TURNED TAIL* AN' NOT ONE A' US *BOUGHT* IT!


GUESS *AGAIN*, ROCK!
UATU SENT MY *STORMTROOPER CLONE* INSIDE GALACTIAC USIN' *MY MIND* SO THE LITTLE GUY HAD A CHANCE AGAINST THE *VIRTUAL DEATHTRAPS* IN THERE!
THOUGHT IT WAS *GAME OVER* FOR *BOTH* OF US WHEN WE GAVE THE NEURAL JUNCTION A BAD CASE OF *MELTDOWN*, BUT...
THE SILVER RACER MUST HAVE COME JUST TO CLAIM THIS ONE, TINY *BRAVE SOUL*.
WHY NOT -- HE WAS THE *BIGGEST HERO OF ALL* TODAY.
TRUE -- BUT I THINK THE RACER WAS TRYING TO *HELP* US, TOO. DOES ANYONE KNOW WHAT *HAPPENED* TO HIM?

BUZZOK
YES! I KNEW WHEN I MONINTORED THE RACER FALLING TO EARTH THAT IT WAS TIME TO MAKE MY MOVE!
AAA--!
NOW HIS POWER -- IS MINE!
THE CHALLENGERS PROUDLY CLAIM TO LIVE ON BORROWED TIME -- BUT THEIR TIME IS UP...
...NOW THAT DOCTOR DOOMSDAY POSSESSES THE TOUCH OF
DEATH!
NEXT: ACE FIGHTS ALONE IN...
THE KILLER SKIES!

CHALLENGERS MOUNTAIN O' MAIL

Dear Editor:

You can't imagine the roller-coaster ride my emotions have been on since I heard about the triumphant return of my favorite team, the Challengers of the Fantastic!

I've seen the ads showing the new creative team. Killer Karl, Terrific Tom, and Audacious Al have the long, long background in this industry to do justice to a team that's had only occasional appearances since the end of the Silver Age many years ago.

I just have one request: this time, don't sully the proud Chall-Fan legend with goofy characters like Red Storm's half-brother, Tino Lumpkin, the team's rock 'n' roll mailman. The whole series fell apart when he joined the team after My Greatest Astonishment #55's stirring tale, "Taps For Johnny!"

Byron Morrisey
Framingdelphia, MA

Glad to have you with us, Byron! The Fantasti-Challs are staying close to home—but we hope you like the new costumes we've given them! And don't worry, we promise not to bring back any characters unless we have a compelling storyline for them. Throwing in goofy characters for no good reason is just not the Amalgam way!

... ...

Dear Tom:

Having followed the CF since those early days when Rocky Grimm was only a state congressman, I have a few requests:

1. Revive the Challenger Haters of Evil! Diablo the Volcano Man, the Radioactive Kra, Drabny the Fixer, Multi-Master, and Ultivac the Multi-Robot make a formidable team! Sure, they all died in the original series, but that won't stop a writer like Karl!

2. Keep June Masters a part of the team. It's true she was mostly hostage bait in the Silver Age, but these are the '90s. She can serve as the fifth Challenger, helping out in times of grave danger. And with her ultra-sensitive sense of touch, she can probably even sew her own costume!

3. Bring back the Un-People! This great team hasn't been seen since their appearances in Strange Tales of the Unexpected many years ago, and they mesh well with the Fantasti-Challs. But lose Triserinak; he's been an embarrassment since he first appeared. I still can't figure out what you were thinking with that one!

4. No alien robot pets! Yes, that's right, dump Cosbie!

That's all for now. Good luck; I'm looking forward to once again seeing that flaming hourglass light up the sky!

Marty Isabella
Cleveton, NJ

It's always a pleasure getting one of your letters, Marty! We wouldn't be the same without long-time readers like you to keep us on our toes. As to your questions:

1. You may have noticed this ish that Killer Karl didn't let a simple thing like death keep him from insinuating a couple of the Challenger-Haters of Evil into our tale. Look for more on them—and the others—in upcoming months!

2. Never fear, June Masters will indeed be a key part of the team! In fact, she may wind up refereeing things in issue #5 when Red Storm's old girlfriend, Corinna Evans, stops by while Dream Crystal is visiting!

3. The Un-People are on our mind, too, as you can tell from their cameo appearance this time! But fans also were clamoring for the return of the Silver Racer, which shows you should be careful what you wish for! Believe us, that's something we keep in mind around Amalgam Comics. We have to admit to having a soft spot in our hearts for Triserinak. You've got to agree, he's an original!

4. We're with you on this one all the way! An alien pet? And a robot one at that? What were we thinking?

... ...

Dear Fantasti-Tom:

Bravo! As you no doubt remember from my many letters to your companion book, Spider-Boy, I have long awaited the triumphant return of the Challengers of the Fantastic. Their appearance in last year's adjectiveless Spider-Boy #1 gave me hope, and now I hear my dreams will be fulfilled.

One thing I must know, however: I've heard reports that you're thinking of letting some of my favorite old-time characters, including Tom Harper, the Guardian Angel, operate again in some way. Is this true?

Max Calvada
Amehurst, MA

You heard right, Max! Later this year, we'll be following up on the new dimensional plane that Reed investigates in this very issue. We're calling it Universe-Two (or U-2, for short), and it offers what we believe will be a wealth of opportunities to show off those characters still remembered fondly by readers like you. A special one-shot is already planned, featuring Spitfire and the Blackhawks, which will include a back-up story highlighting a long-unseen team, Infinity Kickers Inc. It's just one more reason why more and more readers are heeding the call to Ask Aloud About Amalgam!

... ...

Dear Tom:

Okay, brace yourself. I heard about the return of the Fantasti-Challs, and I want to spring one more of my wacky ideas on you. Ready for the big one? I want a crossover!

And who better than the Thunder Crusaders from Radiotower Comics? I realize it's been many years since Dynashield, the No-Fly, and all the rest have had their own series, but you can say the same for a certain group of Challengers of the Fantastic, can't you? Just give it some thought, okay?

Irene Olshevsky Jr.
Bethento, Ontariland, Canada

Glad to see you're still pitching ideas at us, Irene! Don't ever change, you're truly one of a kind.

... ...

Dear Karl, Tom, and Al:

It's welcome news indeed that the Challengers of the Fantastic are returning to the stands. I hope this gives you the chance to delve into what exactly Ace Storm's position in S.H.I.E.L.D. will be now that Bruce Wayne's tragic accident has caused him to withdraw.

It seems she should be next in line—but is she? Will she accept a position away from the action in the field? Not only would that make it harder for her to stay near her boyfriend Prof Richards, but it also would make it difficult for her to explore her attraction to Mariner. Can Senator Grimm help her become S.H.I.E.L.D.'s first female director?

Please don't pass up this opportunity to delve into something that has been ignored in the few cameos the Fantasti-Challs have gained since Bruce left S.H.I.E.L.D. We need to know!

Biljo Evanier
Los Columgeles, MO

And know you shall, Biljo! Sue will step into the spotlight next issue, as our box below promises. We know you won't want to miss it! At the same time, don't count out a good man like Bruce; Amalgam heroes have been able to come back from much worse than having their backs broken by a drugged-up, gun-toting anti-hero like the Banisher!

... ...

Dear Editor:

You know it's coming, so let me be the first to say it: I want a talking gorilla, and I want it now!

Guy H. Wolfman III
San Frangeles, CA

We know "our favorite Guy" is kidding us—but then, he hasn't seen issue #4! That's when the Communists of Gorillagrad begin their march to conquer the world! The Fantasti-Challs must join with the Bronze Tiger, King of Wakanda, to stop the menace of the Red Ghost, Comrade Grodd and Congo-red! What can we say? It's just Another Ambitious Amalgam Accomplishment!

NEXT ISSUE: Never has Ace Storm faced a deadlier foe with more at stake! Single-handedly, she must stop the dreaded Doctor Doomsday—who now is enhanced with the cosmic Asgodian power of the Silver Racer! You won't want to miss "Ace Stands Alone!" Plus, Rocky Grimm returns to Suicide Street to confront the Yancy Newsboy Street Gang and winds up in the weirdest trouble of his life when he meets The Infant Mite Terrible! It's one more reason you should march down to your newsdealer today and tell him: A-Make A-Mine Amalgam!

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